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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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APPLY

August 5, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: MR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE *JHH*

SUBJECT: Hanoi's Decision-Making Process

Attached at Tab A is a CIA Intelligence Memorandum which discusses 12 factors influencing the decision-making process of the 12-odd men in Hanoi's Politburo. The paper predicts that, balancing these factors, the Politburo will conduct a possibly critical review of its current strategy in late August-early September, and will consider three basic options -- press on to victory, protracted warfare, or a change of war strategy and negotiating positions, particularly on ceasefire. Conceivably this review might trigger an unprecedented discussion of the long dormant but potentially explosive issue of a choice between Hanoi's fundamental priorities of pursuing the Southern revolution or building socialism in the North. The memorandum speculates that Ho Chi Minh's death, Pham Van Dong's poor health, and the absence of any demonstrable gains in the offensive could encourage the surfacing of suppressed rivalries among politburo members and provoke a sharp struggle for personal primacy.

The CIA paper asserts that Hanoi's decisions are made on the basis of balancing four sets of 12 factors: the "Human Dimension" (common psychology of the Politburo's members); "the North Vietnamese base" (party discipline in the North, popular morale, manpower and U.S. interdiction campaign); the "Situation in the South" (the status of the Saigon government, the Communist Apparatus in the South, Battlefield Developments); and finally "External Factors" (Sino-Soviet support, the International Developments, U.S. electoral situation and U.S. Negotiating Position).

The paper emphasizes the human context and factors of Hanoi's decision-making process -- the attitudes and relations among the 12 men of the Politburo who makes all major policies in North Vietnam. Xenophobia, sharing a Calvinist-like dogma and convinced that history is on their side, these men approach their decisions with a psychology often alien from the way in which we make our own decisions.

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Discussing those factors affecting the North Vietnamese base, the paper concludes that Party discipline is unlikely to deteriorate in any great extent and that as yet there are no signs of decisive popular morale problems which could force a change of policy. Pressures on morale, however, are acute and the regime will have to keep a weather eye on this matter while applying strict controls to assure compliance with directives. Quantatively, Hanoi's manpower is sufficient to sustain the war in the South at its current level for several years but qualitatively the government is facing significant difficulties. The offensive has seriously weakened the NVA's whole structure, which will need at least 18 months to restore itself to the March 30 levels. Despite the intensive air interdiction campaign, the communists probably have sufficient stocks of military equipment in South Vietnam to support periodic high points for several months and still have the capability to meet their minimum import requirements while continuing to support the war at a high level. (The paper assumes the DRV will be capable of food self-sufficiency, an assumption not borne out by the record of the past couple of years.)

Concerning the "Situation in the South", the politburo almost certainly assumes that the Thieu government is fairly solidly in control. Hanoi does not expect a serious internal crisis in the near future, provided U.S. resolve does not weaken. Of paramount importance in Hanoi's decision-making process is its concern to protect its Southern cadre for future operations. The Politburo also is aware of the limitations of its local military and political apparatus in the South and probably is dissatisfied with its performance in the current fighting. The situation on the Southern battlefields will be an extremely important one in Hanoi's decisions. The North Vietnamese have not yet decided that the 1972 military campaign as a whole is going badly and clearly plan at least one more round of major military activity. In the context of other pressures, a military setback could contribute in a major way to a decision to revise present policy.

Assessing the "External Factors", the CIA study asserts that the Politburo is acutely sensitive to any signs of diminishing interests on the part of its allies but is reasonably confident their commitment will continue. Sino-Soviet support and Hanoi's dependence on it remains an area where there is a potential for great leverage to be exerted on North Vietnam. While the CIA paper doubts that neither the Soviets nor the Chinese will initiate a cut-back in aid, it concludes that Hanoi would be compelled to change its policy if it believed its allies do not intend to provide sufficient supplies.

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While the "International Environment" will not have a decisive influence on Hanoi's thinking, its leaders undoubtedly view the changing international situation with considerable disquiet as their rigidity is out of step with new trends toward accommodation. The Politburo will pay closer attention to the electoral politics of the United States but is not likely to base a fundamental policy shift only on its expectation of the elections outcome. Hanoi almost certainly believes that President Nixon will be re-elected and thus may consider floating some new negotiating formula to probe U.S. willingness to reach a settlement. Finally, the U.S. negotiating position itself is a factor in Hanoi's decision-making process. However, North Vietnamese strategy probably will not be affected by any proposal other than one giving the Communists a clear shot at gaining control in South Vietnam.

or

Comment: The CIA Memorandum does not weigh the relative value/importance of the various factors influencing the decision-making process in Hanoi and scrupulously avoids judgments on the outcome of the forthcoming policy review expected in the last of August or early September. The paper nevertheless emphasizes that no one factor is controlling and that a combination of elements will be required to turn Hanoi from its present course. The study implies that of all the factors a military setback in the South coupled with a conviction that President Nixon will be re-elected and a fear of weakening Soviet-Chinese resolve hold the most promise for a revision of Hanoi's present strategy.

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DRAFT

SECRET
SENSITIVE
3 August 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN HANOI

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

You have indicated to George Carver that you need some paper like the attached in the course of this afternoon. Therefore, I am sending you this draft in the hope that it will be useful for your purposes. It is not an agreed Agency document, so I am making no copies available to the members of WSAG. You have the only text outside the Agency.

Rich
Richard Helms

Attachment - 1

SECRET
SENSITIVE

4 August 1972
(DATE)

SECRET/SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM

**SUBJECT: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION-MAKING
PROCESS IN HANOI**

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

3 August 1972

MEMORANDUMSUBJECT: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION-MAKING
PROCESS IN HANOII. PSYCHOLOGY AND BASIC ATTITUDES OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE
LEADERSHIP

1. Central to any analysis of the factors influencing the decision-making process in Hanoi is an appreciation of the fact that all major decisions -- on peace, war, basic strategy or national policy -- are ultimately made by no more than a dozen men: the nine (possibly ten) surviving full members of the Lao Dong Party's Politburo, in whose decision-making deliberations the Politburo's two alternate members probably also participate.* This is not to contend, of course, that debate

*In order of approximate rank, the nine known full members of the Politburo are Le Duan (the Party's First Secretary and, until Ho Chi Minh's position is formally filled, the Party's de facto chairman), Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong, Pham Hung, Vo Nguyen Giap, Le Duc Tho, Nguyen Duy Trinh, Le Thanh Nghi, and Hoang Van Hoan. The two alternate members are Tran Quoc Hoan (Minister of Public Security) and Van Tien Dung (Chief of Staff of the North Vietnamese Armed Forces). Pham Hung is field director of all Party activities in the COSVN area of South Vietnam (roughly, GVN Military Regions 3 and 4), where he runs COSVN, the PRG/NLF and all other political or military activity conducted by the Party in his area of jurisdiction. Since he physically resides in South Vietnam and/or Cambodia (moving about frequently), he would not normally be present at actual Politburo meetings in Hanoi, though he almost certainly has a secure privacy channel with which he can communicate with his Politburo colleagues, and vice versa. Also, there is strong but not conclusive evidence that in addition to the nine known or overt Politburo members, there is at least one "secret" member: Nguyen Van Linh (who has a string of Party aliases, including Nguyen Van Muoi, Muoi Cuc, etc.). He has been deputy director [Continued on next page]

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on matters of broad policy or basic strategy is confined to the Politburo. The record of the activity preceding major policy decisions in the past strongly suggests that the issue involved was extensively discussed, and perhaps actively debated, at least in the Central Committee, before a final decision was taken.** But the record also makes it abundantly clear that the discussions which count are those conducted within the Party (not the overt governmental) structure and that the final decisions are made in and by the Politburo. Thus when we talk about "North Vietnam's" will, attitudes, determination and policies we are actually talking about the collective views and decisions of less than a dozen individuals.

2. The official line, or myth, is that Politburo decisions are unanimous. This is almost certainly not true, though there probably is give and take around the table until an agreed consensus is reached or until one view (even without a formal vote) clearly has majority support. In any event, the rule of "democratic centralism" is strongly applied. Once decisions are reached, everyone falls into line and further debate ceases, particularly outside the Politburo meeting room. Also, no policy is ever avowedly scrubbed or reversed. Each new strategic tack is described and defended as the logical, inevitable ("correct") outgrowth of its predecessor, based on an "objective analysis of the revolutionary situation."

(and, occasionally, acting director) of COSVN and/or the Nambo (Southern Region) Committee in its various bureaucratic incarnations since the early 1950s and was allegedly made a full (though covert) member of the Lao Dong Politburo in 1967. He too, however, would normally be physically present in South Vietnam and/or Cambodia -- not Hanoi. Brief sketches of these twelve individuals' backgrounds and Party functions are given in this memorandum's annex.

**For example, the discussions in early 1959 leading to the escalation of the fairly low level of "armed struggle" initiated (or resumed) in 1957 into a full-scale "war of national liberation," the December 1963 discussions leading to the introduction of line NVA units into the South, the discussions in the summer of 1967 leading to the big-unit attacks and initiation of negotiations in 1968, and the discussions in the summer and autumn of 1971 leading to the Laos offensive in December 1971 and the South Vietnam offensive launched on 30 March 1972.

3. The nine (or ten) full members of the Politburo and the two alternate members are not automata. Each is an individual with his own background (unique in at least some respects), temperament, private ambitions and personal opinions (including opinions of the other top Party leaders). The dozen-odd men here involved all have known each other, and worked together in a common cause, for a very long time. They do not necessarily like each other, however. Some (e. g., Le Duan and Le Duc Tho, Truong Chinh and Giap) are known to have been more or less bitter rivals in the past, and in the Politburo members' respective private opinions and ambitions (as discussed below) there may lie at least the dormant seeds of future discord. But these dozen top leaders -- who collectively constitute "North Vietnam" so far as final decisions are concerned -- have much in common, particularly with respect to general background and overall outlook.

4. One important element they all have in common is age. The oldest full member of the Politburo (Hoang Van Hoan) is 67; the youngest (Pham Hung and Giap), 60. Their average age is 63, and the spread between their ages is only seven years.* In short, they are all very much of the same generation: revolutionary students in the 1920s and full-time Party careerists since the early 1930s. They also share the characteristic of longevity in the Party's top echelons. Le Duan has been a Politburo member for thirty-four years (since 1938), Truong Chinh for thirty-three years (since 1939), i. e., both have been on the Politburo since Franklin Roosevelt's second term. Pham Van Dong, Giap and Le Duc Tho have all been Politburo members for twenty-one years (since 1951), i. e., since Truman was President. Le Thanh Nghi and Hoang Van Hoan have been Politburo members for sixteen years, or since 1956 -- President Eisenhower's first term; Pham Hung and Nguyen Duy Trinh for fifteen years, or since 1957 -- the first year of President Eisenhower's second term.**

*The two alternate members are somewhat younger, but not much. Van Tien Dung is 55 and Tran Quoc Hoan presumed to be about the same age. Including them would lower the average age slightly to 61.5 (assuming that Hoan is indeed 55). Nguyen Van Linh is believed to be about 59. If he is added to the nine known full members, the average age of the ten is 62.6. If the two alternates are then included (at 55), the average age of the entire dozen becomes 61.3.

**The average tenure on the Politburo of the nine known full members is 21.3 years. Tran Quoc Hoan and Van Tien Dung were named alternate members in 1960, i. e., twelve years ago. If Nguyen Van Linh is indeed a full member, he is by far the most junior in term of service since he is alleged to have been promoted to Politburo membership in 1967, only five years ago.

5. Ethnocentricity heavily laced with xenophobia is another pronounced common trait of the Lao Dong Party's current top leaders. Most of them speak French, some fluently; but unlike Ho Chi Minh, none of them has spent any appreciable time abroad, especially in the non-Communist west.* As a string of senior Soviet and Chinese leaders would almost certainly attest (at least in private), the Lao Dong leadership takes a very dim, suspicious view of foreigners -- all foreigners -- and has a very exaggerated notion of Vietnam's importance in the overall scheme of world affairs. The leadership's innate predilections in this regard have been greatly strengthened by the events of the past twenty years -- particularly the Sino-Soviet split, which enabled Ho (with great finesse) to play Moscow and Peking off against each other in a way that had a profound effect on the outlook, and egos, of his Politburo colleagues and successors, who lack Ho's personal touch, background and perspective. Turned inward, this xenophobic ethnocentricity makes it extraordinarily difficult for the Politburo's members to conceive of Vietnam as anything but a single political entity united under their Party's rule. To all of them, the very idea of a "South Vietnam" where their Party's voice is not dominant is an anathema. This is particularly true in the case of three (possibly four) of the Politburo's most important members, who come from what we (but never they) call "South Vietnam": Le Duan, who heads the Party apparatus and comes from Quang Tri; Pham Van Dong, who runs the DRV state structure and comes from Quang Ngai; and Pham Hung, who runs COSVN and comes from the Mekong delta province of Vinh Long.** The other top Party leaders would be equally wedded to the ultimate goal of a unified Vietnam under Party rule, but might differ on the extent to which virtually all other considerations should be subordinated to pursuit of its early achievement.

*Truong Chinh did of course spend several years with the Chinese Communists during the 1930s, hence his name -- which is Vietnamese for "Long March." Other members have traveled, some fairly often, but on relatively brief trips and almost entirely to other Communist countries.

**If Nguyen Van Linh, Pham Hung's COSVN deputy, is indeed a Politburo member, he makes the fourth, since he was brought up in the Saigon area.

6. The Lao Dong's dozen-odd top decision makers obviously all share a common background of revolutionary experience, discipline and struggle. Perhaps less obvious but at least equally important, they all share a common revolutionary dogma. Here we come to a key ingredient of their common outlook that is extremely difficult for those formed in the western intellectual tradition of post-eighteenth century "rationalism" to comprehend. We can, and do, glibly acknowledge that the Politburo's members are dedicated, even fanatic Marxist-Leninists. We often fail to appreciate, however, the full consequences of this fact: namely that the Politburo's decisions are strongly influenced by what might be termed "religious" considerations of a kind that have not really been operative with western statesmen since the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Giap and the NVA commanders molded in his image approach war much more in the spirit of a Tilly or a Wallenstein than that of a Wellington, a Rommel or even a Koutouzov. The Politburo members' Weltanschauung bears much closer affinities to that of the dour elders of Calvin's sixteenth century Geneva theocracy than to that of any western state's cabinet or National Security Council.

7. The Lao Dong's top leaders genuinely envisage Marxism-Leninism as a process which, when correctly followed, yields absolute truth. They see their cause as running with the grain of History (with Hegel's capital H), which to them means that -- by definition -- it cannot successfully be resisted and is ultimately certain to prevail. Also, the Politburo regards dissent -- i. e., error -- very much as did Calvin or St. Ignatius Loyola. Its members do not look on their domestic political opponents or rivals the way Democrats view Republicans, Laborites view Conservatives, or even Socialists view Gaullists. To the Party, political dissent and domestic (including South Vietnamese) opposition -- again by definition -- is a mark of ignorance or evil or both. Dissent and dissenters are to be extirpated, not accommodated. Except for temporary tactical considerations, Truth can never be expected to tolerate Error, Heresy or Heretics.

8. This is not to say that the Party's leaders are not or cannot be pragmatic. They clearly have been and certainly are. But their pragmatism is rooted in their theology and their long personal and institutional experience. For one thing, the Party has persisted for four decades during which a host of opponents, both domestic and foreign, have come and gone: the Japanese, the Chinese Nationalists, a whole series of French governments and six U. S. Presidents, not to mention Bao Dai, Diem, Big Minh, Khanh, Quat, Ky and now Thieu. This has understandably bred and fostered the conviction that the Party's institutional staying power is considerably greater than that of any given group of domestic or foreign opponents.

9. At several points over the past four decades, the Party has been in potentially serious trouble if not on the verge of defeat or collapse. Each time it has been saved or given a new chance by some deus ex machina. The advent of Leon Blum and the Front Populaire gave it a much needed respite from the Surete in the mid-1930s and at the end of that decade the Japanese put the French on ice for five critical years. Chinese Nationalist and U.S. concentration on the goal of harassing and ultimately defeating Japan provided fresh opportunities in the early forties, greatly augmented by the chaos that followed Japan's precipitate surrender. Mao's conquest of China in 1949 (giving the Vietnamese Communists a common border with an increasingly helpful ally) saved the Party from indefinite containment and probably defeat at the hands of the then returned French. The erosion of French will and its collapse after Dien Bien Phu gave them partial victory in a struggle they might not have been able to continue much longer (if Khrushchev's alleged memoirs are to be believed). The southern struggle's burgeoning problems in 1961 and 1962 dissipated in the rising discord among South Vietnam's non and anti-Communist factions, culminating in the overthrow of Diem. Domestic political pressures and events in the United States ameliorated the disastrous internal consequences of their 1968 offensives. And even now, when faced with a mix of problems as severe as any they have ever had to cope with, the Party's leaders see the candidate of one of America's two major parties actively campaigning for President on a platform calling for immediate U.S. disengagement from Indochina and the cessation of all aid to the Party's major internal rival.

10. The above record has not transformed the Politburo into a collection of Micawbers. Its members do not plod ahead in adversity childishly hoping that "something will turn up." Instead, they read the record of the past four decades as vindication of their Marxist theology. The Party is moving with the tide of History. Its opponents, by definition, are not. Its opponents therefore must -- again by definition -- be beset with "internal contradictions" which, by rigorous ("correct") analysis, the Party can exploit to avoid crippling defeat and, eventually, achieve ultimate victory. But the Party's leaders also believe that one can stay with the stream of History only by carefully studying and "correctly" applying Her lessons -- which means recognizing (though never admitting) past mistakes and avoiding any subsequent repetition. This is one reason why the Politburo is so chary of even discussing, let alone accepting, any compromise negotiated settlement -- even one that, from our perspective, looks very generous and gives the Party a far better than even chance of ultimately dominating South Vietnam. The Party tried the negotiated settlement route once before -- in 1954 -- with odds that at the time seemed to verge on 100% in favor of

complete, early success. Despite the apparent odds, that gamble proved out in fact to be a disastrous failure. Furthermore, the leader who had to cope directly with the immediate consequences of that failure was Le Duan, who ran the Southern Region from 1952 through 1956. History, in short, has taught that a negotiated settlement that does not virtually guarantee success is a potentially dangerous pitfall, a trap that History indicates should be avoided. Ergo (at least in considerable measure) the Politburo's current intransigence on the subject of Thieu.

11. None of the above means that the Politburo's members are infinitely wise, resilient, resourceful or determined. They are very fallible human beings of limited breadth, often victims of their own dogma, who in the past have made several major errors of judgment. It does mean, however, that the background and attitudes with which they approach their policy decisions are quite different from and in many respects alien to the perspective and attitudes with which we approach our decisions. The Politburo is composed of aging and Asian revolutionary theologues, not relatively young systems analysts schooled in western universities. They do not think of themselves as playing political chess, hence they are not wont to look at the situation, ponder the loss of key pieces or assets (e.g., their ports) and opt to resign or offer a draw. That is simply not the way they reason or act. Instead, as they debate and determine their political and military policies over the near and medium future, the Politburo's members will assess the total mix of the various kinds of considerations outlined in the remainder of this memorandum -- weighing the mix from their perspective, not ours.

II. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE BASE

12. One set of considerations the Politburo obviously must weigh carefully involves the various factors affecting the strength, resiliency and viability of North Vietnam -- both as a functioning political entity in itself and as a base from which continued revolutionary struggle in the south can be supported. In Communist terminology, this involves assessing those factors which enable North Vietnam to function as "the great rear" for the southern struggle.

13. Party Discipline in the North. Since the Party apparatus is the regime's main instrument for guiding and motivating the populace, Party discipline and responsiveness is one of the Politburo's constant concerns. Much has been demanded of Party cadres and members over the years. By and large, they seem to have responded satisfactorily; but the regime's current propaganda makes it clear that they are going to be called on for exceptional efforts in the coming months. Simultaneously, perhaps in part as a warning to potential malingerers or wrong-thinking "revisionists" within the Party, the regime's security apparatus has recently been given greater prominence. The new demands are sure to cause some grumbling in Party ranks, and implementation as usual will not always be efficient. Still, the discipline of the Party as a whole seems unlikely to deteriorate to any great extent -- probably not to the point where the regime considers its control seriously weakened, and almost certainly not to the point where a groundswell of Party discontent could make it impossible for the Politburo to continue its current war policy.

14. Popular Morale. "Public opinion" obviously does not have the political force or impact in a Communist state -- particularly North Vietnam -- that it does in a Western democracy such as the United States. Furthermore, over the past two decades, the Party has been very careful, thorough and efficient in gaining control over the entire population, silencing (or liquidating) potential critics and eliminating non-Party channels for voicing dissent. The internal press and radio are Party/state monopolies. There is no such thing as public debate save for the discussion conducted in Party journals staying well within Party-dictated

bounds. Nonetheless, public opinion -- broadly defined -- is something the Party cannot entirely ignore. In 1956, for example, popular revulsion at the excesses of the so-called "Land Reform" program became a decisive factor the Party had to recognize, particularly when this revulsion ignited a genuinely spontaneous, and highly embarrassing, peasant revolt in Ho Chi Minh's native province of Nghe An. The Nghe An revolt was swiftly and ruthlessly suppressed by the NVA, but the Party was forced to trim its policy. The "Land Reform" program was called off. Ho and Giap made public apologies, and Truong Chinh lost his position as Party First Secretary, though not his position on the Politburo.

15. In the current phase of struggle, the North Vietnamese populace has remained responsive to the regime's directives through years of hardship and privation. This responsiveness is due in part to a genuine devotion to the "revolution"; in part to the regime's tight control and its ability to conceal some of the costs of the war from the people; and in part also to the modest nature of the material needs that must be satisfied. Acclimated to generations of near-subsistence living and inured to privation in earlier phases of the war, the people have tended to contemplate the prospect of further belt-tightening with apparent stoicism.

16. Nonetheless, pressures on morale since the start of the March 1972 offensive have been acute. The intensity of the U.S. bombing, and especially the mining of North Vietnamese ports, almost certainly came as a shock. The cities have been evacuated for the second time in a decade, and the steady trickle of inhabitants back into urban areas attests to the hardships evacuation causes. The government's efforts to control food distribution more tightly have also probably inspired some unhappiness among the peasantry. Although the populace probably knows very little about the details of the offensive itself, sufficient information seems to have seeped through to paint a general picture of high Communist casualties and only modest gains. Finally, the regime has made it clear to the populace at large as well as to the Party members that further hardships are in store in the coming months. The recent general mobilization order will undoubtedly be read as a sign that the government's future demands will cut closer to the bone than before. There are some elements in the current situation that tend to stiffen morale -- for instance anger over the U.S. bombing campaign -- but these probably are not enough to offset the negative factors.

17. Faced with this sort of pressure, the regime will almost certainly have to rely more heavily on the stick than on the carrot to get what it wants out of the people. Indeed, a general tightening of North Vietnamese control mechanisms has been in progress for months. Unless it gets psychologically exploitable military successes in the south or other developments occur that can be sold to the home front as signs of major success (e.g., a respite from bombing), the Politburo will have to keep a weather eye on popular morale in North Vietnam if it wants to persist in present policies. There are as yet no signs, however, of the kind of morale problems that of themselves could pressure the DRV regime into a change in policy.

18. Manpower. Being an essential resource in any war effort, manpower is obviously a matter of continuing, major Politburo concern. In terms of raw manpower resources, it would appear that Hanoi could sustain the war in South Vietnam at its current level of intensity for several years. There are approximately 400,000 men between the ages of 17 and 25 in North Vietnam's manpower pool who are physically fit and available for military duty. In addition, Hanoi can induct and train the more than 100,000 men reaching draft age each year without lowering this reserve. While enemy losses cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, the evidence that we do have suggests that the Communists have replaced most of their losses. According to captured North Vietnamese troops, most of the replacements fall within the 17-to-25 age group, suggesting that Hanoi has not had to improvise to meet its manpower needs or to accept marginally qualified people. Infiltration statistics indicate that approximately 100,000 replacements have moved south through the infiltration pipeline since last October.

19. Despite the availability of sufficient manpower in raw numerical terms, however, Hanoi is facing significant difficulties with its manpower in a qualitative sense. This year's extraordinary campaign has seriously weakened the whole structure of the NVA, a force carefully built up during the intervening period since the heavy fighting of 1968. Almost all infantry regiments have seen very heavy combat, and many of them have lost such a large share of cadre and experienced troops as to be considered combat-ineffective as regiments, even though we continue to see elements from them engaged. A number of marginal

regiments -- territorial regiments, training regiments, and hastily formed regiments -- were also used this year. Many units have, for all practical purposes, been destroyed. Large numbers of difficult-to-organize-and-train units have also been largely destroyed. Notably, the armored regiments appear used up, and artillery and AAA units have also been subjected to greater losses than ever before. Hanoi probably would need at least 18 months after this year's hard campaign to reorganize, train, and refit its army and get it back near the level of proficiency with which it began this year's campaign on 30 March.

20. Another major manpower constraint for Hanoi results from the fact that the north is no longer a safe sanctuary area for battered NVA combat units. As a result of the resumption of bombing, Hanoi can no longer as easily and safely move its major combat forces out of South Vietnam into rear bases in North Vietnam to rebuild and refit. Hanoi may attempt more of its rejuvenations of combat units in the future on or near the battlefield. The Communist divisions that have already gone through refitting this spring in South Vietnam following heavy losses have not returned to their former strength. None of them has performed well after refitting.

21. Hanoi's recent commitment of two former training regiments with raw recruits to combat in northern South Vietnam will also reduce, at least temporarily, its ability to turn out additional adequately trained infantry troops.* The loss may be small in terms of Hanoi's total training capabilities, and part of it probably can be made up by other units. If the two regiments operated on a three-month training cycle, they probably trained only 12 battalions for infiltration this past dry season before they themselves moved south. This is only a small part of the more than 200 such battalions that were sent through the infiltration system during the dry season. Nevertheless, the fact that Hanoi has reached the point of using even a few of its training units in combat indicates that the North Vietnamese military leadership itself regards its manpower problems as fairly serious, and is willing to risk some degradation of future training capabilities in an effort to meet its present requirements.

*The two regiments are the 48B and 64B regiments of the 320th Training Division. They have been fighting in northern MR 1 since late June.

22. The U.S. Interdiction Campaign. Another factor bearing heavily on decision-making in North Vietnam in coming months will be the views and attitudes of North Vietnam's leaders concerning the present U.S. interdiction campaign. The North Vietnamese almost certainly expect the campaign to continue through the U.S. elections in November; they probably believe it will last a good deal longer than that if President Nixon is re-elected. As we estimated earlier, in purely material terms the interdiction campaign poses obstacles to the Communist war effort that are very serious but probably not insurmountable.* The Communists probably have sufficient stocks of military equipment in and near South Vietnam to support periodic high levels of offensive action for several months. We lack sufficient data to determine precisely current levels of imports, but there is good evidence that substantial amounts of supplies are moving across the Sino-North Vietnamese border. If the North Vietnamese can provide for most of their food needs from internal sources, we estimate that they have the capability to move sufficient tonnages overland from China to satisfy at least their minimum import requirements and to continue supporting the war in the south at a high level.

23. On the food problem, the North Vietnamese probably have on hand enough food to meet their needs until the tenth-month crop is harvested in October of this year. At that point, much depends on the harvest. If it is good, the North Vietnamese will have sufficient food from domestic sources to get through until the early spring of 1973. If the tenth-month harvest is poor -- because of severe flooding such as that which occurred last year or for other reasons -- the North Vietnamese could face food shortages by the end of this year. Any imports of food which Hanoi succeeds in obtaining would, of course, postpone or alleviate such shortages.

24. Other factors will also affect the judgment of North Vietnamese leaders on the question of whether the actual flow of overland imports is sufficient for their needs. If they were unsure of future Soviet and Chinese aid levels, for instance, they might be more chary in their commitment of the material already at hand. (The converse -- an increase in their military efforts over the short run in hopes of both having maximum impact on the U.S. election campaign and putting the squeeze on their suppliers in Moscow and Peking -- would be less likely but still possible.) A turn for the worse in the Communist offensive from Hanoi's point of view might also lead the Politburo to husband its resources, although this is only one of many variables it would have to consider in reaching such a decision.

*See CIA Intelligence Memorandum entitled "The Impact of Events Since 8 May 1972 on North Vietnamese Capabilities to Continue the War," 3 July 1972, TCS No. 3895/72, TOP SECRET SENSITIVE

III. THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH

25. In addition to the situation in the "Great Rear Base" of North Vietnam, Hanoi's leaders will obviously pay careful attention to a whole range of considerations concerning events in South Vietnam -- as seen through their own eyes -- over the next few months. Their judgments about the strengths and weaknesses of the Saigon government, the ability of the Viet Cong apparatus to maintain itself in the south, and the course of the war itself in South Vietnam will all influence the decision-making processes of the dozen men who rule the north.

26. The Saigon Government. In weighing the question of where they stand in the south, the Communists almost certainly start with the premise that the Thieu government, however unpopular it may be, is fairly solidly in control. They are aware that President Thieu and his top commanders were severely criticized for the military reverses South Vietnamese forces suffered in the early part of the current offensive, and that, almost simultaneously, an economic recession and domestic opposition to Thieu's request for emergency decree powers created further strains on his government. But the government was still able to act with reasonable effectiveness in all of these situations and none developed into a serious threat to its stability.

27. In looking ahead over the next several months, the Communists almost certainly do not expect an internal crisis in the south that could shake the Thieu government from its foundations, barring a major South Vietnamese military setback or some sign of a serious weakening of U.S. resolve. Most of the political factions that have caused headaches for Saigon in the past have been docile of late, and unwilling to rock the boat much in the latest enemy offensive. Even if these factions were not now quiescent, the Communists must recognize from past experience that they cannot count on gaining much more than local advantage from internal political upheavals such as the Buddhist struggle movements.

28. Nevertheless, the Communists undoubtedly view the government in Saigon as containing inherent weaknesses ("contradictions") stemming from its lack of strong popular identification and ideological cement and from what they see as its almost total dependence on the U. S. for its longer term survival. Although the Communists may hold a distorted view of the extent to which the Thieu government is or is not actually accepted in the south, they probably do not give much weight to this factor in the immediate circumstances. More likely, they regard

prospects for eroding or eliminating Thieu and his apparatus as related to the support Saigon receives from the U.S. They may hope that Saigon could be severely shaken by some development in the U.S. election campaign or some action of the U.S. Congress. They probably believe that their best chance of causing the downfall of Thieu or his abandonment by the U.S. is to make some major move in the military sphere or in the negotiating sphere. They would try to take advantage of any unforeseen event such as Thieu's death, although they would most likely approach a new situation with some caution rather than with some immediate or bold new initiative.

29. The Communist Apparatus in the South. In assessing where they can go in the south, the Communists must be quite conscious of the limitations of their assets, both military and political. At present, without the presence of North Vietnamese main force units, the Viet Cong local forces and guerrillas are no match for Saigon's armed forces and territorials, and the Party's politico-administrative cadres (often overlapping with guerrilla cadres) are no match for Saigon's administrative structure. Although these Viet Cong structures have recovered somewhat since Tet 1968, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, the Saigon government's gains in pacification over the past few years have greatly circumscribed the areas in which Viet Cong cadres and forces can operate with impunity. In addition, the government's Phung Hoang program has served as a constant harassment to Viet Cong subversive operations. Indeed, while the enemy's main forces were pulled back in enclaves or operating across the border for a prolonged period, Communist political cadres themselves were forced to pull back or to face the prospect of gradual stagnation and retrenchment. Although the Communists may have hoped to change this trend with their offensive this spring, agent reports reflect a continuing dissatisfaction of higher party echelons with the performance of the Viet Cong local forces and cadres in support of main force operations.

30. Two main factors must enter into Hanoi's consideration about the future of its political and guerrilla forces in the south: the role that these assets can play in the present situation and the question of protecting and developing them for the future. Short of outright takeover and control by the north itself, these political and military cadres are the Communists' principal hope of exercising political power in the south. In several areas during the current offensive, the cadres surfaced quickly to organize and administer local populations in territory seized by Communist forces. If

they surface prematurely, however, they run the risk of destruction. Over the longer run, in any political settlement of the war the preservation of these forces from non-Communist retaliation and the assurance of an environment in which they can operate and expand are vital conditions for the Hanoi leadership. These forces are the means by which the Communists hope to share in and eventually monopolize political power in the south.

31. Such considerations may not in themselves be determining factors in whether or not Hanoi continues fighting or negotiates a peace, but they are clearly of paramount importance in its decision-making process. Rebuilding the cadre structure in the south is a long-term proposition and Hanoi has no intention of sacrificing it needlessly, especially as it considers possible cease-fire arrangements or post-war political arrangements.

32. Developments in the Military Struggle. The course of the war in the coming weeks will be an extremely important factor in the future decisions of the North Vietnamese leadership. The touchstone of the Vietnamese Communist attitude toward the war has always been the theologically-rooted belief that Communist chances of victory will improve with time, that eventually the Party's staying power will prevail as its enemies founder on their inherent "contradictions." This belief, persisting to date through both success and adversity, has consistently made Hanoi unwilling to bargain in meaningful fashion since the negotiations got underway in 1968. As long as Hanoi continues to believe that time is on its side, a real softening in the Communist position is unlikely. The question, of course, is whether anything in the current situation might contribute to a change in this basic attitude.

33. This year, the Communists launched an all-out military offensive, and clearly hoped that their success would be greater than has in fact been the case. It is equally clear that they did not anticipate the strength and magnitude of the U. S. reaction. Although U. S. air and naval power has played a major role in blunting the enemy's offensive, South Vietnamese forces on the ground -- albeit with some notable exceptions -- have generally fought doggedly and with considerable competence. North Vietnamese propaganda often alleges that without the backing of U. S. airpower the ARVN could not stand up against Communist forces. In their own minds, however, Hanoi's leaders presumably have a fairly realistic picture of the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces at this point.

34. At the same time, Communist preparations to continue a high level of military activity, at least in certain parts of South Vietnam, make it evident that the North Vietnamese have not yet decided that their 1972 military campaign as a whole is going badly for them. They have not reached the point of cutting their losses, and they clearly plan at least one more round of major military activity. The inference to be derived from this is that they still believe time is on their side.

35. Assuming there is another heavy round of combat over the next two or three months, it is impossible to judge at present whether the results of that combat would lead to a change in Hanoi's attitude on the war. On the one hand, the Communists' past record strongly suggests that their confidence in ultimate victory is not likely to be undermined solely by current developments on the battlefield. On the other hand, as the rest of this memorandum indicates, Hanoi's leadership is now under more pressure than it probably has ever been in the past from a combination of events far broader in scope than the course of the military battle itself. In the context of these other pressures, it is possible that a setback to Hanoi on the battlefield in coming weeks could contribute in a major way to a decision by North Vietnam to revise its present policy for conducting the war -- though not its ultimate objectives.

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IV. EXTERNAL FACTORS

36. Sino-Soviet Support. Totally dependent on military and economic assistance from the Soviet Union and China to carry out the war in South Vietnam effectively, the North Vietnamese leaders are acutely sensitive to any signs of diminishing interest on the part of their allies. They also are highly vulnerable to any pressure that suggests a serious curtailment of this logistical support. Hanoi's obvious dismay and anger at the Soviets' failure either to challenge the American blockade of the ports or to cancel the Moscow summit in protest, and, later, irritation with Chinese delaying tactics in arranging alternate means of delivery for Soviet cargo were clear reflections of this vulnerability. Current resupply efforts and the recently concluded agreement with Peking for supplementary economic and military aid have undoubtedly reassured Hanoi that the basic commitment of its allies is still in force.

37. Hanoi probably is reasonably confident that this commitment will continue. It knows that neither Moscow nor Peking wants to risk being tagged as the instrument of North Vietnam's defeat. And their continuing rivalry for regional influence, which has worked to Hanoi's benefit in the past, still argues against either abandoning the field to the other. Hanoi may anticipate, however, far more niggardly support than in the past. Moscow's apparent embarrassment over the scale and nature of the current offensive -- for which it (knowingly or not) provided the hardware -- and the more muted signs of Chinese disapproval with NVA tactics must leave Hanoi's leaders far less confident that they can request and receive the shopping list necessary for a repeat performance. Indeed, Hanoi may see a warning in the Soviets' refusal to provide their Egyptian ally with unlimited arms support.

38. Political pressures devoid of such logistical constraints are not likely to have a compelling impact on Hanoi's planning. The North Vietnamese have never taken their allies totally into their confidence, basically because they have little trust in either of them. Hanoi is well aware that its allies place higher priority on their current maneuvering with the U.S. than on the war, and suspects that their advice does not

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necessarily have North Vietnamese interests at heart. The recent summit meetings have only reinforced Hanoi's fear of great-power connivance which could undercut North Vietnam's basic objectives. Both Moscow and Peking have now rather bluntly pointed out the benefits of negotiating a compromise settlement that would lead to an American military withdrawal. Hanoi's reaction has ranged from deafness to hostility. As long as Moscow and Peking are unwilling to impose logistical restraints, Hanoi is not likely to heed their fraternal advice for compromise.

39. If -- at some point -- the North Vietnamese were faced with the prospect of greatly reduced Soviet and Chinese military aid, there would immediately be a major new element in the mix of considerations which influence decision-making in Hanoi. The important thing here would be Hanoi's reading of Moscow's and Peking's intent.* If North Vietnam ever came to believe that its allies did not intend to provide sufficient supplies to continue the war at a high level, its leaders would almost certainly recognize that they could not continue fighting the type of war which they have been waging in 1972. They would feel compelled to change their policy -- either by making major concessions in negotiations or by reverting to a much more austere level of hostilities. It should be emphasized that we have absolutely no evidence that either Moscow or Peking do intend to cut back on their military assistance to North Vietnam, and we doubt that either nation would believe that it had enough flexibility in its relations with Hanoi or with each other to initiate such a cut-back. This is one area, however, where there is a potential for great leverage to be exerted on Hanoi.

40. The International Environment. Despite their uncompromising stance, the North Vietnamese leaders undoubtedly view the changing international environment with considerable disquiet. They have found a sympathetic international image a useful asset, not only for generating

*The U.S. interdiction program probably will prevent North Vietnam from receiving a significant portion of its normal imports; but our evidence indicates that provided the USSR and China bring the goods to the Sino-North Vietnamese border, enough goods will get through to supply Hanoi with its military requirements and at least its minimum economic needs.

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further pressure on the U.S., but also in promoting their role as the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle -- a point used in soliciting aid from their Communist allies. But the maneuverings between the U.S. and China and the USSR have not only overshadowed Vietnam and diluted Hanoi's ability to command attention and sympathy, but its once steadfast allies are showing increasing impatience with the war.

41. Hanoi's leaders face the danger that their rigid unwillingness to compromise their goals may seem increasingly out of step with the new trend in world politics toward compromise and accommodation. Their anger and self-righteous indignation with Peking and Moscow's summit diplomacy is inescapable, even though their allies' summitry could later be rationalized as a kind of behavior peculiar to great powers and perhaps inevitable in terms of their broader interests. But the disclosure of secret talks between the two Koreas must have been a particularly jolting blow. Hanoi's leaders have often expressed a special kinship with Pyongyang, whose war and long-uncompromising posture seemed so analogous to their own. Watching Kim Il-sung commit the revisionist heresy of opening a dialogue with President Park cannot fail to produce a profound sense of unease around the Politburo table in Hanoi.

42. Hanoi may react to these developments to the point of renewing its efforts to appear reasonable but not to the point of offering any substantial compromises. The "diplomatic struggle," however, remains a secondary tactical adjunct to the basic military and political conflict in South Vietnam, and it is unlikely that the international developments discussed in the preceding paragraph will have a decisive influence on Hanoi's thinking in the near future.

43. The U.S. Electoral Situation. Hanoi's leaders will pay close attention to the state of electoral politics in the U.S. during the coming months, but they will do so with their own sense of perspective. Hanoi views all U.S. politicians with suspicion and is leery about whether any U.S. president actually would carry out his campaign "promises." Thus, even though Hanoi has implied a "preference" for Senator McGovern and hopes that anti-war sentiment will be a factor in the campaign, the

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policy makers in North Vietnam are probably predisposed to view such developments as potential windfalls and not as something to bank on.

44. If over the next few months Hanoi's leaders came to believe that the McGovern candidacy had a reasonable chance of being successful, they would be even more inclined to stay on their present course. They would reason that their prospects under a new administration pledged to end U.S. involvement in Indochina would be greater than under the present administration. Given these circumstances, the leaders in Hanoi would prefer to wait out the election and then see what tack the new president took.

45. Hanoi's current assessment, however, is almost certainly that President Nixon is likely to be returned to office. If this continues to be the case, Hanoi, perhaps seconded by Moscow and Peking, might consider floating some new negotiating formula in an effort to probe the U.S. willingness to reach a settlement. Hanoi might reason that during the heat of a presidential campaign, the Administration would be more willing to give ground than it would afterwards. Hanoi's leaders would be unlikely to make a basic policy shift based solely on their expectations of the outcome of the U.S. presidential election; but in combination with some of the other factors discussed in this memorandum, it is possible that developments in the U.S. election campaign could contribute to a change of policy in Hanoi.

46. The U.S. Negotiating Position. From Hanoi's vantage, negotiations are only one tactic to be employed in the quest for control of Vietnam. Moreover, the North Vietnamese leaders view negotiations with some distaste. They believe that they were euchred once before at the bargaining table, and they are loath to leave much to chance this time around. For example, regardless of the military respite it might gain, Hanoi would find it exceedingly difficult to accept a negotiated settlement which did not give the Communists a clear shot at gaining control in South Vietnam. Considering the amount of material and human resources invested in the struggle, the North Vietnamese leaders might not consider half a loaf better than none, particularly if it meant acknowledging failure to achieve their objectives.

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47. This is not to say that there are no changes in the U.S. negotiating stance which could lead Hanoi to consider modifying its own position. The pressures on Hanoi have increased over the past year, and it would certainly welcome an end to U.S. bombing and interdiction operations against North Vietnam. In the absence of critical problems affecting the situation on the battlefield or North Vietnam itself, Hanoi's reaction to a new U.S. negotiating initiative would turn primarily on the effects of the U.S. proposal on Communist prospects in South Vietnam. And to Hanoi this basically comes down to the distribution of power. Thus, unless Hanoi felt itself under intense pressure on the battlefield or from within North Vietnam, it would be unlikely to alter its policies solely on the basis of a new U.S. negotiating position, unless that position indicated that the U.S. were willing to see the removal of the present GVN or to make other concessions which seemed likely to pull the props out from under Thieu's regime.

V. STRIKING THE BALANCE

48. In deciding the Lao Dong Party's optimum strategy over the weeks, months and years ahead, the members of its ruling Politburo must obviously strike some kind of balance among and between the considerations outlined above. Any such balance perforce involves judgmental weighting of the various factors involved. The need to protect and preserve the current social structure in North Vietnam and the Party's position therein, for example, must be weighed against the desire to acquire political control over the south. Are these two goals in even potential conflict? If so, how much can or should the former be jeopardized in pursuit of the latter -- or vice versa? Are there practical political limits to the hardships and sacrifices that can be demanded of the North Vietnamese people? How reliable are Hanoi's two major Communist allies in the changing climate of world politics, with detente in the air, with both China and the Soviet Union developing bilateral interests with the United States? How slight or great is the risk of the NVA's being undisguisably and humiliatingly defeated on the ground by the ARVN if the Communists persist in big unit battles? Conversely, what is the likelihood that the NVA can inflict defeats on

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the ARVN sufficiently decisive to have significant political impact in South Vietnam and abroad? Is the GVN likely to get stronger or weaker with the passage of time? How long can the U.S. politically sustain a major involvement in Indochinese affairs and how is its range of options likely to be affected by the current electoral contest? How responsive and resilient are the Party's cadre and apparatus? Would they understand and accept a major shift in strategy after the leadership's recent exhortations to all out action and promises of dramatic success? What are the probable risks and gains involved in pursuing present policies as opposed to those involved in alternate strategies -- such as a show of negotiating flexibility or a move to a lower scale, protracted war type of effort?

49. This is an illustrative -- and far from exhaustive -- enumeration of the kind of questions the Politburo must ponder collectively and each of its members, privately. It is within such a total context that Politburo members, jointly and severally, will weigh specific items of intelligence or observed fact (e.g., supply stock levels, manpower losses and import input flows) -- weighing them, however, from their perspective and in terms of their perception of political dynamics. No given datum or set of facts is likely, of itself, to be decisive. For example, there is almost certainly no given loss rate, stock level or import threshold that would, of itself, dictate any given Politburo member's ultimate policy recommendation.

50. Such questions are almost certainly already being at least privately pondered by the Politburo's individual members. Logic would suggest that the Politburo will probably engage in some sort of collective review of the total situation in late August or early September. By that time, near term trends in most of the Party's key areas of concern should be conclusive enough to support at least interim judgments. By then, for example, this season's high water will have crested, there either will or will not have been major flooding, the Party can make a reasonably solid estimate of the tenth-month crop and, hence, can get a fair fix on its probable domestic food situation for the next nine-odd months. By then, Hanoi should have a fairly solid idea of what medium to long term logistical arrangements its Soviet and Chinese allies are, or are

not, going to make to offset the loss of seaborne imports -- and how adequate these arrangements are likely to be in Hanoi's terms. By September, the pattern of what North Vietnamese Army units are, or are not, going to be able to achieve on South Vietnamese battlefields should be reasonably clear, along with the likelihood, or lack thereof, of the Communists' making more than transient inroads into the GVN's control of South Vietnam's rural population. By then it should be reasonably evident whether the events of the spring and summer have left the GVN apparently weaker or stronger than it was in mid-March before the Communist offensive was launched. By then, the American electoral picture should be perceptibly clearer, to a degree permitting much more confident estimates of how close the race is likely to be -- if not who is likely to win -- and to what extent domestic U.S. attitudes toward Vietnam are likely to have a major political impact on either the election's outcome or President Nixon's policies, especially his negotiating posture. Also, by then -- in light of what has happened in the other areas of concern -- the Politburo should have a reasonably clear fix on the probable morale impact of alternative policy choices on its Army, its Party cadre, and its people.

51. If it does indeed conduct a late August-early September bidding review, the Politburo will have essentially three broad policy options: (1) continue on approximately its present course of military pressure with periodic big-unit high points, coupled with intransigence on the negotiating front, (2) revert to a perceptibly lower, protracted war scale of military effort, again without substantive alteration in its political/negotiating position, or (3) make a material change in its current position regarding cease-fire and the conditions for a negotiated settlement. The first, in essence, is a "press on to victory" scenario more or less ignoring (or at least accepting) the costs thereby entailed. The second is a strategy keyed to conserving both human and material assets and playing for the long haul. The third option puts a premium on winding up the military phase of the struggle -- at least for the time being -- with a subsequent concentration on competition in the political arena.

52. It is almost impossible to estimate now which of these three broad options might look most attractive (or least unattractive) to either the whole Politburo or a dominant majority thereof four to six weeks hence. Much will depend on the actual events, in various quarters, of those intervening weeks. The first or "press on" option would clearly involve the greatest short to medium term cost, since if it is followed the bombing of the north would presumably continue and battlefield losses would run higher than they would run under either of the other two. On the other hand, it holds the greatest apparent promise of an early victory which, if achieved -- e.g., by a perceptible unravelling of GVN effectiveness or a major U.S. negotiating concession -- could be plausibly used to justify any costs entailed. Furthermore, it has bureaucratic inertia going for it. In any bureaucracy, including a Communist Party, it is easier to resolve a debate by modifying a current policy or continuing it "for the time being" than to agree on a major change.

53. The second and third options -- lower profile protracted war or a new negotiating approach, perhaps including cease-fire -- would both have the advantage of reducing near term costs, dramatically so if either could be exploited to end the bombing of the north and/or closure of the ports. From a "face" point of view, however, with all the consequences thereby entailed -- including impact on Army, Party cadre and popular morale, not to mention the morale of the GVN and the ARVN -- the adoption of either of these options would inevitably be read as at least a tacit admission that the 1972 offensive had failed and that the U.S./GVN counter-action (including the bombing and mining) had had a considerable measure of success. The low profile/protracted war option would more or less indefinitely postpone the long promised day of ultimate victory, which would be bound to depress the morale of the Party and its supporters, particularly in the south. The negotiation/cease-fire/move to the political arena option would entail accepting risks that up to now the Politburo has evinced an adamant reluctance to take.

VI. THE HUMAN DIMENSION

54. At this point, the human factor comes back into the equation. As explained in this memorandum's opening section, the policy decisions of "Hanoi" are made by a dozen-odd top Party leaders, lifelong subscribers

to the doctrine of "democratic centralism" who make a fetish of presenting a united, common front to the world outside the Politburo meeting room. Though all of the same generation, with a shared revolutionary background and subscribing to a common dogma, these dozen top leaders are not automata. Even within their common framework, each has his private opinions, private ambitions and private feelings with respect to his colleagues and their policy positions. Each will have his own private view of how he shades and weights the complex, interacting factors the Politburo must collectively consider.

55. Also, there are certain historical factors very germane to any future Politburo policy debates, factors of which all the Politburo's full and alternate members are very much aware. First, there is clear Party precedent for a top leader's losing his position when the policies he had advocated produce unacceptable results. In 1956, Truong Chinh lost his First Secretaryship -- and the mantle of Ho's almost certain successor -- because of the consequences of the Land Reform program he had advocated and directed. Furthermore, he lost his position to Le Duan -- and Truong Chinh would not be human, certainly not Vietnamese, if this did not still rankle. No matter how he ultimately casts his policy vote, Truong Chinh cannot be blind to the fact that Le Duan is as much the architect and director of the southern struggle as he himself was of "Land Reform."

56. Secondly, there is the ghost of Ho Chi Minh. While Ho was alive, no one on the Politburo would have dared (or wanted) dispute a decision to which he had given his blessing. He could tack, jibe or come about without any risk of mutinous mutterings from his officers, watch hands or Party crew. He could, and did, fight or talk or do both simultaneously -- collaborate with the French to crush and liquidate non-Communist Vietnamese nationalists, dissolve the overt Party to better fight the French, institute Land Reform, apologize for Land Reform, accept the Geneva settlement, resume armed struggle, all without missing a beat or ever being personally called to account by his mesmerized lieutenants. But Ho has been dead for almost three years and his chair still sits empty at the head of the Politburo table.

As First Secretary, Le Duan is first among his surviving Politburo equals, but he is not the Party Chairman. The fact that Ho's position as Chairman remains unfilled after three years strongly suggests that no member of the Politburo has sufficient primacy or support to be confirmed as Ho's successor and probably means that each of those who want Ho's mantle recognizes that he cannot now reach for it without risking a fight that could jeopardize if not destroy the Party. The fact of non-succession probably also means that Ho's chair is not going to be filled until the eventual outcome of the southern struggle becomes more discernably clear.

57. When Ho died on 3 September 1969, the Party's policy/strategy line was set and relatively unambiguous: intransigence at the negotiating table coupled with continued, protracted-war type military pressure in and on South Vietnam, the latter involving essentially economy of force tactics interspersed with occasional high points involving battalion-regimental (but not divisional) size attacks. The shift to big-unit war signalled by the December 1971 offensive in Laos and the 30 March 1972 offensive in South Vietnam was the first major policy change adopted and implemented after Ho's death. Any bidding review involving questions about this new policy's wisdom or success sufficiently trenchant to prompt a serious discussion of alternatives will pose the Lao Dong leadership with a kind of problem it has never before had to face.

58. The strategic line has, of course, shifted on many earlier occasions during the Party's four decades of struggle. The Tet 68 offensive was a shift to big-unit combat, abandoned after February 1969 in favor of a return to protracted war. But the 1972 situation is different from the 1968-69 situation in at least two major respects: In 1969 it could be plausibly argued that despite a lack of success (and attendant problems thereby generated) on the ground in South Vietnam, the 1968-69 offensives were a net plus because they had forced the Americans to stop bombing, knocked President Johnson out of office, gotten negotiations started at no significant political cost to the DRV, crystallized and intensified U.S. domestic opposition to the war, and forced the U.S. Government onto the path of progressive disengagement. Secondly, in 1969 Ho was still alive to terminate any acrimonious debate and give his blessing to the policy of retrenchment involved in the return to a lower military profile.

59. Any policy debates entered into now will have to be conducted without a final arbiter whose rulings all participants will unhesitatingly accept. If events of the next few weeks, or next several months, should unfold in ways adverse to Hanoi's interests, those who advocated the offensive strategy will be open to the charge that their policy has not succeeded and, instead, got the bombing resumed in a way worse than before, got the ports closed to boot, and generated difficulties with Hanoi's Communist allies of a kind never heretofore experienced.

60. If a Politburo bidding review conducted within the next two months, or at any subsequent time, quickly produces a consensus judgment that current policies are yielding sufficient net benefits to warrant their continuation, then no serious rifts are likely to emerge within the top Party leadership. This would almost certainly be the case if, say, the ARVN were to suffer several major defeats, the U. S. were to make a significant negotiating move indicating a willingness to accommodate Hanoi's adamant position on Thieu, the U. S. were to stop the bombing without insisting on a major, tangible quid pro quo, or reasonably solid evidence pointed to a rising tide of public opposition to the war within the United States at least potentially capable of getting Senator McGovern elected or inducing a major change in President Nixon's Indochina policies. On the other hand, any bidding review that produced serious Politburo disagreement on the wisdom of continuing present policies and prompted a genuine debate over alternatives could be extremely divisive -- even if the decision ultimately reached was to stay on the present course.

61. The now dormant but potentially explosive issue which, if ever joined, could split the Politburo in two is the basic question of priorities alluded to above: If a choice has to be made, which takes precedence -- preserving and building a Communist state in the North or pursuing the revolutionary struggle for control of the South? Over the past years, there has been much speculation -- most of it fruitless and some of it sheer nonsense -- over alleged factions within the Politburo (e. g., hard-liners versus soft-liners, pro-Soviets versus pro-Chinese). Things are just not that neat or tidy in this group of a dozen men of common outlook and background who have worked closely together in a common cause for decades. Nonetheless, there has long been some evidence of at least a latent polarization between what might be loosely termed "North Vietnam

firsters" probably grouped around Truong Chinh and what might be called "Southern struggle firsters" almost certainly grouped around Le Duan.* The evidence also suggests, however, a strong desire on everyone's part to mute any such polarization by keeping this specific priority issue safely under the rug.

62. Without Ho present to insist that it stay there, this basic priorities issue could probably not be kept under the rug in any major Politburo debate over alternative policies prompted by a strong argument that the current policy was not producing results commensurate with its risks and costs. Any such policy debate, in turn, would almost inevitably soon involve or encompass personalities and a sharp struggle for personal primacy on the part of at least some of the Politburo's members, a struggle which the other members would find difficult to smother and from which they would probably find it even more difficult to stay aloof.

63. In this context, Pham Van Dong's health could prove to be the catalyst precipitating precisely the kind of debate the Politburo wants least. Not only is he a senior member of the Politburo, he also -- as Premier -- is the operating head of the State structure. Were he to die in the near future, he would have to be replaced fairly soon with a designated successor. (Any excessive delay would be swiftly read by

*For example, in a book entitled Democratic Republic of Vietnam written by Pham Hung (now field director of the war in the south) and published in Moscow in 1960, Pham Hung -- in a passage praising the January 1959 15th Party Plenum (which ratified the decision to escalate the southern struggle into a full scale "war of national liberation") -- makes the following remark: "We should dwell on those errors which were committed during the period of building socialism in North Vietnam, (i. e., 1954-1956, while Truong Chinh was First Secretary), namely: a slackening of attention towards problems pertaining to the national-democratic revolution in South Vietnam, a gap between the socialist revolution in the North and the national democratic revolution in the south. It is also incorrect to consider the opinion that the socialist revolution is significant only with respect to the north."

the Party cadre as a sure sign of major divisions in the top leadership.) The inclinations of whoever was picked would inevitably have a major impact on the present balance and interlocking web of relationships within the Politburo, hence any unavoidable need for making such a choice might inevitably open Pandora's box.

64. We are not suggesting or predicting that the Politburo is on the verge of a divisive split with potentially major impact on the whole Indochina situation. We have simply tried to describe the many factors, forces and considerations influencing the dozen odd men who, in the final analysis, make "Hanoi's" decisions. Far from the least of these is the intricate balance of interlocking relationships between these dozen men themselves. Any major change in these relationships -- i. e., new faces at the Politburo table, the absence of faces now there or even a significant rearrangement of the current occupants' chairs -- could lead to, or itself signify, a major change in North Vietnamese policy.

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